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The Hatchet Job on Westmoreland

I was surprised and dismayed by William F. Buckley Jr.'s article, "The Uncounted Enemy" [op ed, Feb. 2]. I was surprised by how readily a man of Buckley's background accepted the substance of the hatchet job on Gen. William Westmoreland by Mike Wal-

Taking Exception

lace, carried out on CBS Jan. 23 with his usual skill at that kind of thing. I was dismayed by Buckley's unqualified conclusion, "the documentary absolutely establishes that Westmoreland, for political reasons, withheld from the president, probably from the Joint Chiefs, from Congress and from the American people information about the enemy that was vital to any sensible reordering of one's thoughts toward the war, whether one were doveminded or otherwise."

In short, Buckley finds Westmoreland guilty of having concealed for political reasons intelligence regarding enemy strength which, if known in Washington, might have changed the course of the war. Such an offense, had it been committed, would have been worthy of Benedict Arnold and would have demanded an immediate court-martial as soon as discovered.

I personally resent this grossly unfair judgment of Westmoreland, a longtime respected friend of the utmost integrity and a companion of battlefields in World War II and Korea. I might also take umbrage from the fact that I was one of the advisers of President Johnson on Vietnam who should have detected this duplicity on the part of his field commander without waiting for Mike Wallace to make the discovery.

But the fact is that I was quite aware at the time of the nature of the issue that has stirred up this rumpus, as were most of the officials in Washington watching over the situation in Vietnam. The matter was relatively trivial—an argument between the intelligence offi-

cers of Westmoreland's headquarters and the local CIA over the proper classification of Viet Cong who were apparently part guerrillas and part political activists. No one denied or ignored the existence of some thousands of these hybrids, although there was no assurance as to their exact numbers—an uncertainty applicable to almost all Viet Cong statistics. The question was whether they should be counted as soldiers, a position Westmoreland's headquarters opposed.

As a member of the president's Foreign Intelligence Advisory Board at the time, I had occasion to examine the case of both sides and concluded to my own satisfaction that it made no difference in Washington how it was decided—a position shared by the colleagues with whom I discussed the matter. But the important point I wish to make is that there was no concealment of the matter in Saigon and that it was well known and well aired in Washington.

So much for the groundlessness of the charge against Westmoreland. But Buckley goes quite a bit further. He closes his article with the following words: "What is the missing context of the Vietnamese War is a thoroughgoing congressional investigation of its appalling conduct."

I can hardly imagine a greater disaster for the republic than a nationwide battle of hard words now over who was responsible for all that "appalled" in this unpopular war. Many partisans of the past could even now produce a long list of enemies, some thus far uncounted like the controversial Viet Cong above, who caused the failure of our Vietnam policy. But at best it would likely result in little more than an outburst of divisive vindictiveness and hard feeling which I hoped we had learned to suppress. This is something we do not need.

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man of the Joint Chiefs of Staff.*